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**Allenby's First Attempt on Jerusalem:  
A Chapter in Scottish Military History**

**BY  
J. L. MORISON**

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# MEDITERRANEAN SEA

MAP TO ILLUSTRATE THE FIRST  
CAMPAIGN OF FIELD MARSHAL  
LORD ALLENBY

SCALE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
MILES

RAILWAY ———  
ROADS ———  
LINE OF  
ADVANCE  
OF 52ND.  
DIVISION. +++



# ALLENBY'S FIRST ATTEMPT ON JERUSALEM: A CHAPTER IN SCOTTISH MILITARY HISTORY.\*

## I. Introductory.

LATE in March, 1918, the 52nd (Lowland) Division was ordered from the lines which it had constructed north of Jaffa, to join Haig's forces in France. With that movement terminated the episode which still affects all its members with an emotion livelier than does any other, even in the great concluding struggles of the war—the advance of Allenby.

It is my intention to describe, in the following pages, the most memorable but least known of the operations in that great campaign, the first attempt to capture Jerusalem.

A brief outline must first be given of the earlier career of the division; for like all the other divisional units of the war, it could boast no inheritance of glorious memories, and, even within its own territorial district, it was better known in detail through its constituent battalions than as a whole. A creature of yesterday, it must submit to the indignity of being described.

The twelve battalions, constituting till 1918 the infantry of the Division, were grouped into the 155th, 156th, and 157th Brigades of the Imperial Army, and represented the main territorial contribution made by the Lowland districts of Scotland. Of the 155th Brigade, the 4th and 5th King's Own Scottish Borderers belonged to the Border counties and Dumfriesshire, the 4th and 5th Royal Scots Fusiliers to Ayrshire. Of the 156th Brigade, the 4th Royal Scots inherited the volunteer traditions of the Queen's Edinburgh Rifles; the 7th Royal Scots were drawn largely from the districts of Leith, Musselburgh, and Dalkeith, with a strong body of Lanark men attached from the 8th Highland Light Infantry, while Glasgow was represented by the 7th and 8th Scottish Rifles. The 157th Brigade should have been constituted entirely out of Glasgow battalions—the 5th, 6th and 7th Highland Light Infantry were

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\*I am indebted to Major-General John Hill, C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C., for the official records on which this sketch is based, and take this opportunity of thanking him for this and very many other acts of courtesy and kindness.

all recruited in that district. But the 8th and 9th battalions of that regiment were not available, and the vacant place was taken by the 5th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, a Greenock territorial unit. The organization of the Division was completed by the inclusion of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Lowland Field Ambulances, the 410th, 412th, and 413th Field Companies, R. E., and the 261st, 262nd, and 264th Brigades, R.F.A. By one of the whimsical accidents of war, the original Divisional Train, while it accompanied the force to Egypt, and sent detachments to Gallipoli, speedily lost its original connection, and accompanied the 10th (Irish) Division to Serbia and Macedonia. Even after its return to Egypt in August, 1917, only the commanding officer, Colonel Matthew, with one other officer and a few details, found their way back to their own Division. The actual personnel of the train came from the 31st Division.

With the last exception, the 52nd was in a very real sense the product of Lowland Scotland. Its men were not only drawn from every district south of the Clyde and Forth, but represented with great fidelity all the occupations to be found in that most flourishing part of Scotland. The Glasgow and Edinburgh battalions were composed of city men, clerks, mechanics, employees in the great business houses and municipal departments, with a sprinkling from the arts and professions, architects, teachers, or gentlemen of leisure, who had joined as privates in the great burst of patriotism at the beginning of the war. The Argylls furnished men from the shipyards of the lower Clyde, engineers from Greenock and Port-Glasgow, and a fair sprinkling of Highlanders from the Western Islands. The characteristic note of the 7th Royal Scots was its skill in mining, for its men came, not only from the coal mines of the East Coast, but also, as has been mentioned, from Lanarkshire. To all these must be added the weavers and factory hands, farmers and tradesmen of the Borders and S. W. counties, who formed the Borderers and Fusiliers.

The Division, then, was in itself a little Scottish world, and its nationality was always beyond dispute. Its rank and file had the Lowland toughness of physical build, humorous caution, and practical shrewdness, and that unwillingness to

own defeat which the Lowlander shares with his Highland cousin. They remained from first to last tenaciously provincial, and it was strange, three years after war had started, to hear the Lowland dialect startle the silence of the desert, or to listen to discussions of the deeds of Glasgow and Edinburgh football heroes, while memories of patriarchs and Arab conquerors and crusading adventurers called from the surrounding groves and hills.

By October, 1917, the Division had already had a history and had acquired its first military traditions. At the outbreak of the war two-thirds of the battalions had been at once despatched to coast defence work, garrisoning the East Coast of Scotland, furnishing posts for the great Clyde shipyards, and fulfilling a score of minor duties on the lower Firth of Clyde. They had been finally organized as a Division in the spring of 1915, and had seen actual war for the first time in their landings on Gallipoli in June and July of that year. They dated their first stricken fields from June 28th and July 12th, 1915, the days on which they first went over the top and paid their first tithe to the war-god—dates likely to remain for long memorial days with the survivors. Egypt saw them once more at the beginning of 1916, and, after a spell of garrison work in the Canal Zone, they had been the first infantry to share in the advance which ended so disastrously for the Turks at Romani. Step by step thereafter they had accompanied the rail head and the pipe line through Salmana, Mada'an, Mazar and half a dozen other *hods* and *birs* and *wadis*, till the struggles round Gaza anchored them for a season just in front of the Wadi Guzzee.

The months between the second battle of Gaza, and the beginning of Allenby's advance were perhaps the least eventful, but by no means the least happy in their memories. All that time, the Division lay within a sector bounded by the Mediterranean on the left, and the strange mound of Tell el Jemmi on the right. The hills and valleys and villages there became household words in Fifty-Second camps. There was Samson Ridge in front of Gaza near the sea, where the Fusiliers and Borderers scored their first success in raiding; Kurd Valley, with its barley covered slopes, where the Turk used

sometimes to snipe with H. E. at rash pedestrians; Blazed Hill and Lees Hill, where, in early days of the siege, battalions had worked en masse, in open moonlight, at the trenches, and the Turks had let them dig. Still further to the right, and inland, were Mansurah Ridge and the Apex, with their memories of dour and trying patrol work in the summer months, and Mendur with its fleas, and the redoubts from which the look-out posts could see the heights above Shellal and the other wing of the British defensive line.

During these passive months the engineers of the Division had dug wells and laid wire roads and organized the defences of the district. Night after night the camels of the train had borne their loads from railhead to dumps, and from dumps to the widely scattered trenches. Organization had settled down into a steady routine; and, apart from an inevitable increase in septic sores, the medical and sanitary sections had contrived to maintain a wonderful standard of health. By autumn, the Division had come to regard itself as a great united family, doing its work steadily if without brilliance.

With the arrival of the new commander-in-chief, Sir Edmund Allenby, another chapter in the history of the Division began. The reputation of General Allenby as a "strafer" and man of decisive action, had preceded him; nor had the Expeditionary force long to wait before they felt his influence. The whole army was reorganized, overhauled, and unified, and fresh energy introduced with his revision of the various staffs. For the 52nd this upturn meant their inclusion in the new Twenty-first Corps, and the arrival of a new Divisional General. Major-General John Hill, C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C., was an officer of the Indian Army, with a record in France, Gallipoli, and Egypt to his credit, and his restless energy and quick decisiveness soon told on his command. Nowhere perhaps was his hand felt so distinctly as in the restoration of the infantry section as the fundamental fact in the working of battalions. In the new training, every man was made to feel himself an essential part of a distinct small unit, and indispensable there. It meant a quickening of individual initiative in the whole division. Under General Hill were three Brigadiers of widely differing characteristics, but all tried

men, and all Gallipoli veterans; Pollock McCall of the 155th, Leggett, of the 156th, and Hamilton Moore of the 157th.

The Division was now on the threshold of a systematic conquest of Southern Palestine. A short description of the country they were to traverse becomes therefore necessary. Southern Palestine, from Gaza on toward Haifa and Mount Carmel, lies divided into several successive belts of land, each running from north to south, and varying widely in its characteristics and suitability for operations. From the sea-beach, varying in breadth from place to place, stretches a land of sand-dunes. The shore usually rises in abrupt sand-cliffs, from which the dunes mount up in tumbled and wandering ridges to meet the firmer soil further inland. It is a region of no cultivation and little growth save here and there some clumps of palms or fig-trees. Water there is for those who care to dig in the sand near the beach, and much of it is drinkable, although all of it is impregnated with salts of one kind or another. For military purposes, the coastal sand affords always the worst of roads for marching, and its many mounds and hollows, combined as these are with broad stretches of practically coverless sand, make defence easy to a force strong in machine guns, and attack correspondingly expensive and difficult. In the sand region there is only a scattered population, except in the capital city, Gaza, and in the vicinity of Askalon.

But on the border-line where the firmer soil begins, one finds Herbieh with its orange groves; Mejdél, the only rival in these parts to Gaza, as a seat of government, and further north Beshshit, Yebnah, Katrah and Mughar. All these places lie in the second strip of Palestine and form part of the valley of Sharon, which runs just within the sandy region, with a varying breadth, from Carmel in the north to Mejdél in the south. This is a region where systematic cultivation begins, with water in its subsoil, and in the spring a fair appearance of verdure and numerous wild flowers. For the soldier, it is a country of firmer roads, occasional supplies of oranges, scant water, and defensible ridges and heights, which the Division was to find, to its cost, ideal posts for machine gun fire. But the dominating military feature of the plain

of Sharon is the railway which runs throughout its entire length from south to north, and has its strategic centre and most vulnerable point at Junction station, where the branch line to Jerusalem turns eastward to that city.

Into the region of the coastal plain run the foothills or Shephelah, the next subdivision of the land, a slightly elevated tract of cultivated ground, producing barley and wheat, figs, olives, and higher up, vines. For the purposes of this history its military characteristics may be disregarded. It was only a halfway house between the plain and the Judaeian hills. With these hills we come to the region of dominating interest for our history, as previously for all invaders of Palestine. It is true that Napoleon refused to turn aside to snatch at the prize, Jerusalem, which they hold in their bosom. But Napoleon was an adventurer in a hurry, and had his position become more secure it is hard to believe that he would have resisted the fascination which the Holy City exercises on imaginative minds, or have ignored the influences which the prestige of occupying it always exerts over the East. Here, then, was the centre of political interest and the crux of the strategic situation.

A more detailed examination of the military characteristics of this hill country may be deferred until later; but it may here be said that the two obvious approaches to Jerusalem from the plain are the railway line which enters the hills by the Wadi es Surar, and runs to its destination with a wide fling south through Bittir, and the mail road which takes a directer and more northern course by Kubab, Latron, and Kuryat el Enab. As we shall see, political considerations and military necessities directed the 52nd Division in its march on Jerusalem by a most complicated and difficult approach farther north than either of the recognized routes.

It is possible now to summarize the difficulties of *terrain* in front of the British force. Should the campaign be directed, on the left, towards Jaffa, the worst difficulties would simply be the heavy coastal sand, the initial scarcity of water, the frequency of good local rearguard positions, and, now and then, as at the Wadi Hesi or the Wadi Sukereir, lines formed by deep dry water courses where the retiring enemy would find

positions ready made for his new defensive works. But if Jerusalem should become an objective for the forces operating on the plains, there were wretched roads (all save one), hill passes susceptible of easy defence, wadi openings which ended in blind alleys against Turkish hill defences, and mountain villages lofty and terraced, each capable of being converted into a machine-gun fortress, and commanded from heights still further back, if the British attack should succeed.

As for local sources of supply, the region in front of Allenby's force was singularly poor. There were orange groves in plenty, especially near Jaffa, and it would sometimes be possible to purchase—at a price—some brown bread from Jewish or German colonies like Katrah, Sarona, or Mulebbis, or a very occasional supply of fresh meat—even in the hills. But, short of Jaffa, there was no real centre of supply, and the only certainties were the staple bully beef, biscuit and tea; and these might well arrive in scanty quantities, should the advance push on into the roadless hill country.

## II. The Advance on Jerusalem.

In Sir Edmund Allenby's plan of campaign the primary fact was a crushing stroke at the left flank of the Turkish army, and that he had entrusted to the mounted troops, with the support of infantry from the Twentieth Corps. As a secondary operation of very great importance he had also ordered an assault on the defensive works at Gaza. But as the British right lingered after the victory at Beersheba, and the troops near the sea pushed on through Gaza, driving the Turks before them in a series of hard-fought actions, the strategic balance between the flanks altered. The British left, with the 52nd Division in front, took the lead, and hustled the enemy in the maritime section from position after position. Indeed, so headlong was the infantry advance that, for once at least in open warfare, the staff watched infantry showing cavalry their heels, and rescuing them repeatedly from serious difficulties. Night actions on the 7th-8th, 8th-9th, and 10th-11th November dislodged the enemy from the line of the Wadi Hesi and the old Philistine city of Esdud, and

a great concerted advance between Nov. 11th and Nov. 15th secured the important junction where the Turkish railway branches east to Jerusalem and north towards Jaffa, and made the occupation of that latter city certain. But between the 15th and the 18th of November the plans of the 52nd Division suffered a sudden and dramatic change. On the first of these dates the three brigades took up their lines from Katrah, through Mansurah to Yebnah, looking towards Jaffa. On the morning of the 18th the staff were reconnoitring a defensive line in advance of Ludd. By evening orders had come for an advance straight into the heart of the Judaeen hills. The meaning of the change was that the commander-in-chief had determined to make a sudden dash for Jerusalem, calculating on the demoralization of his opponents, and had entrusted the main stroke to the 52nd and 75th Divisions. By rights it was time for the Twentieth Corps to enter, but their transport arrangements could not get them up in time, and time was everything. The strategic situation might well be called extraordinary. The Turkish front now stretched from the sea through a long curve which bent rapidly to the south among the Judaeen hills, and terminated on the Hebron road in front of the long delayed British right wing. It ran more or less parallel, and close to, the roads leading from Jaffa to Jerusalem, but north and north-west of the latter city it circled sharply round to the south along a series of very strong hill positions, which must be carried before the Holy City fell. Still, it was an undefined and ragged line which would shatter into fragments before a bold stroke at any fundamental point. Such a blow the 52nd and 75th Divisions were now asked to strike at the very heart. With the Yeomanry Division operating on the left towards Beitunia and Bireh, and the 75th Division advancing towards the objective by a more southerly route, the 52nd was ordered to push straight on until it lay astride the Jerusalem-Nablous road.

The dangers of the move were painfully obvious. To begin with, no matter how undefined the Turkish front or how efficient the cavalry support on the left, it was a flank march across an enemy front, and memories of all the flank marches form the beginning down to Von Kluck's notorious venture

hardly recommended the repetition of such a manoeuvre. Apart altogether from the fate of the actual attack, the long line of communications from Ludd into the heart of the hills was dangerously open to attack. As events proved, even a partial check on the left exposed the whole line, for it lay throughout its entire length on the limit of the territory occupied by us; and at many points it could be swept by fire from the Turkish guns—in places even by their machine guns.

The nature of the country, too, complicated the task of the Division. It was a land of bald and stony hillsides, which fell steeply, sometimes through 2,000 feet, to rough water-courses—a jumbled mass of hilltops, precipices, glens and gullies. According to the maps, roads traversed it, more especially from east to west, but all of them were rough, and most of them were sheep-tracks, impracticable for wheeled traffic, or even for camels, and permitting only of infantry advance in file or single file. The objectives of attack were certain to be villages perched on terraced hill slopes, as often as not commanded by still steeper and more forbidding positions. It was a land where the hills and valleys presented continual surprises, and often, as the troops struggled in thin lines uphill and down dale, they would find some sudden turn of the way, or lift over hill-shoulder, expose them to unexpected frontal or enfilade fire. Cover of a kind there was from boulders or rough sangars, but trenching was of course impossible. Whatever protection there was naturally favored the defence, to whom the general lie of the land was already known. "Thae hills," said an exasperated Scot on the march, "may be mighty fine for yon Italians or airyplanes; but they're no the place for ceevilisit sogers."

In two particulars especially the advancing force found the nature of the ground handicap their operations. The force co-operating on the left was cavalry, but the Judæan hills, as the Yeomanry discovered to their cost, were better fitted for mountain goats than horses. Besides this, since it was a country almost roadless and full of boulder-strewn and unexpected gradients, wheeled transport speedily became unavailable; field guns could only be got forward by doubling or quadrupling the teams, and even the faithful camel, who had

seen the Division through so much already, found it difficult to keep his legs. One of the first duties demanded of a force which required all its rifle strength for the fighting line was that of road making.

Some powerful arguments supported the plan of a headlong rush on Jerusalem. The Turks had been defeated, perhaps demoralized. If a sudden blow were struck at the heart, it was likely that something like a collapse would take place. The consequences of such a collapse were obvious. The force near the sea would be driven still more widely apart from that among the hills, and Nablous would be their first real point of union. It was important also to secure Jerusalem, the centre of three great eastern religions; and the success of a startling *coup de main* was certain to deliver the city unspoiled into the hands of the conquerors, and magnify their prestige throughout the East.

There were, however, arguments more strictly military. A considerable body of Turks still lay south of Jerusalem watching and checking the movements of the British right. Contained by the force in front of them, and threatened directly in the rear by the capture of the Jerusalem road, they would have but one way of escape left, by Jericho; so that a sudden British occupation of the Holy City might at any moment develop into a disaster for this southern Turkish wing.

Once more, the Judæan hills, as has been pointed out, furnished an ideal field for resolute defence, and harassing guerilla warfare. They had seen, from first to last, many great armies foiled by the natural obstacles they offered. From a hill-crest on the way before the Division, Richard Coeur de Lion had turned back with the goal of all his aspirations in sight and yet unattained. Should unheroic measures be taken, the positions which, as we shall see, fell before two or three long marches and some resolute attacks, might take months to reduce; and these positions, even if they did not guarantee further successes, were of high value in themselves.

It was with this blended cup of trouble and hope held out to them that the 52nd Division marched out from Ramleh and Ludd, in the words of the corps order, "to free Jerusalem from the degrading occupation of the Turk." It was a ro-

mantic thought that perhaps the first Christian victors in Jerusalem for seven centuries might be of Scottish nationality.

The adventure which began on November 18th, related as it happened, not as it should have happened, illustrates the difference between actual war and war as the journalists picture it. It is a story of long marches, wet and cold bivouacs, hard, apparently unremunerative fighting, with one or two superb passages of arms, where the troops of the Division saved not only themselves but the British line. The Brigades moved towards their ultimate objective by roads which at first held them separate. The 155th Brigade had marched from the Katrah area to Ramleh, and their road to Berfilya lay across the rough country near Annabeh. Meanwhile the 156th, with the 157th behind them, pushed on to Ludd, the starting point for their venture. Now at last the weather broke. The troops had spent a long summer in almost unbroken sunshine. No doubt operations had commenced with a heavy thunderstorm and a downpour of rain which had set the water-courses in motion, but the early marches had been made in hot *khamsein* weather. Now the Judaeian winter began in grim earnest, and made the barren hills tenfold more forbidding than before. There was rain on the 18th, 19th and 20th, and the Division, accustomed to semi-tropical conditions, felt the change more acutely because they were advancing in light order, bivouacing in the open with a maximum sleeping equipment of a blanket and a "bivvie" sheet for every two. The temperature fell, and as they advanced into the sleet of the hills, they were chilled to the bone besides being drenched to the skin. There were nights when the tired but sleepless battalions welcomed the first morning move as a less painful duty than the futile attempt to rest in cold and wet.

The 19th of November was the beginning both of sorrows and adventures. The condition of the roads, the fact that a cavalry division had been put across their path, and the movement of long trains of guns and transport naturally hampered progress. It was not so much the distance marched as the protracted delays on the road which told on everyone. Ludd had been left early in the morning, and at Berfilya, which was

reached by the 157th Brigade about three in the afternoon, that brigade had to pass through the 156th. But at this point the 261st Brigade, R.F.A., finding the road impassable for guns, wheeled out of the column. It was a slow operation, for the ground beside the road was even worse; and the passage was not clear before five. At that hour, with the winter night beginning to set in, the 157th brigade pushed on to Beit Likia. It was a night of troubles. The rain was falling; the men stumbled along the stony pathway, feeling the strain of every step they marched, and cursing the surveyors who had represented the boulder-strewn hillsides in their maps as roads. "Wull nane of ye ca' the feet from the —— that's leadin' on" was the most reproducible comment made by the men as they tramped on. Somewhere about ten at night, the column halted, drenched to the skin, and bivouacked as cheerlessly as they had marched. The last of the transport did not arrive till one in the morning. The war had by this time passed out of the earlier simpler phases, and in the difficult work among the hills it was fortunate that on the staff were men who had had experience of Indian frontier fighting. In the advance towards Jerusalem nothing made further progress possible, but constant "picketing of the heights" a practice the necessity of which had been learned in a long series of wars with Indian hill tribes.

At five the column was once more on its way, its main objective the capture of Beit Dukku, a village in the hills to the north of the Beit Likia road. Unfortunately existing maps failed to give any adequate idea of the surrounding country, and the absence in them of regular contour lines proved most misleading. Native guides were at hand, but whether through ignorance or of set purpose they were most inaccurate, reporting that the enemy had left the immediate neighborhood of Jerusalem. After advancing for some distance, and finding that the country was in reality entirely different from that depicted on the ordnance maps, Hamilton Moore decided that it was necessary to alter completely the plans and orders which he had issued at three o'clock that morninig. He therefore collected all commanding officers at the head of the column, and under cover of the advanced guard went on to a

high hill which commanded a good view of the surrounding country. There he constructed a fresh plan and issued new orders. These now ran to the effect that the 7th H. L. I. should sweep round to the north-west, the other two Highland Light Infantry battalions moving on the place in shorter circles. But the ground was so difficult, and the maps so inadequate that the 7th H. L. I. did not get forward in time, and one of the companies, mistaking the Wadi Marua for the Wadi Selma, turned up at Beit Anan on the main road in time to assist in its capture. In the meantime the 5th H. L. I., who had been ordered to crown the road as it passed between heights into Beit Anan, were greeted as they reached the heights with a brisk fire from rifles and machine guns. The brigade was now practically committed to an action at Beit Anan as a preliminary to further progress. First the village itself was cleared; then the heights to the east and south-east and by night the Turks held only one strong point, from which they withdrew under cover of darkness. The patrol which ascertained this retirement was a highly creditable piece of work. Early on November 21st Lieutenant Agnew, C.Q.M.S. King, and Sergeant Black, all of the 5th H. L. I., climbed the steep and rocky position from which the Turks had been annoying them, expecting every minute to be greeted with fire from the crest, and found them gone.

But this is to anticipate events

About 10.30 on November 20th Dukku had fallen to the 6th H. L. I., the main trouble here, as elsewhere, being the work of clearing the surrounding hill crests. As the 157th Brigade was still at the head of the column and the enemy was close at hand, and still full of fight, outposts became a consideration of the first importance, and the 5th A. and S. H., the 5th H. L. I., and the 6th H. L. I., took over the line. It was another night of rain, and the men on outpost duty, shivering in the open without blankets or great-coats, voted it the worst spell they had had since leaving Gallipoli. By this time the rest of the Division was coming up, and since the absence of roads meant also the absence of artillery and wheeled transport, all hands available went to work at road-making. The Divisional Engineers had done much useful service since leav-

ing Gaza, but their best days were spent in superintending the battalions as they cleared paths between Beit Likia, Ku-beibeh, and Biddu, and assisted the 75th Division on their way from Kuryet el Enab.

While the others were engaged on road-making and outpost duties, the 156th Brigade received orders to relieve the 75th Division, which had advanced through the more southerly route by Kuryet el Enab, and had established a precarious hold on Biddu, and Nebi Samwil. This latter point was a commanding height some five miles north-west of Jerusalem, and celebrated as the reputed burial place of the prophet Samuel—on that account a place as famous in tradition as it was important strategically. Nebi Samwil indeed was a vital point in the advance; without it any further progress towards the Jerusalem road must prove impossible. At the same time the Turkish artillery at Lifta, Er Ram, and Ram Allah found it an easy target for their guns; it was encircled at closer range with powerful Turkish strongholds, and the ridge itself was not yet cleared of Turks. Its defenders were therefore unlikely to find their occupation of it unchallenged. The importance of the place in the history of the Division demands a detailed description. "Nebi Samwil itself," says the Brigadier of the 156th, "is a mosque with tall minaret, situated on the highest point of a long ridge which runs practically parallel to, and about one mile to the east of the Roman road connecting Biddu and El Jib. To the north of the mosque the ridge is for some 1,200 yards broad, flat, and devoid of cover, and then falls sharply towards the Wadi just south of Bir Nebala. The western slopes of the ridge were not so steep, but were all swept by fire from El Jib, which was held by the enemy. The immediate vicinity of the mosque consisted of stone walled enclosures, courtyards, and stone buildings, spreading for a distance of 450 yards to the north and north-east (where there was also a small mosque and native village), but elsewhere extending for no greater distance than 100 yards. Once clear of the enclosures, the ground to the east fell sharply to the Wadi Hannina, and to the west in a series of natural rock terraces and gentle slopes to the Roman road."

The actual occupation of this position by the Division was

as dramatic as the operations which ensued. In relief of the 75th Division, the Royal Scots occupied Biddu and Beit Surik; and even there the appearance of strain and insecurity was conspicuous. But the situation did not develop fully until the two Scottish Rifles battalions advanced to Nebi Samwil itself to relieve the 234th Brigade, which was in position there. Long before their arrival they could see the ridge and the mosque under heavy shell fire. On their arrival, with Lieut-Colonel Findlay in command, the first communication they received was the news that the situation was too grave to make immediate relief possible. In the fierce struggle which followed, the 7th Scottish Rifles figured most prominently, and to them fell the honor of checking a most determined attack on the ridge and of re-establishing the British occupation there securely. The troops to be relieved had suffered heavy casualties in taking the position, and the constant shelling, to which their absence of any artillery prevented them from replying, had still further weakened their strength. Nothing indeed could have been more timely than the reinforcement of the firing line, early on the afternoon of November 22nd, by three companies of the 7th Scottish Rifles. By half-past four it seemed possible to proceed with the relief, and it was arranged that the 8th Scottish Rifles should be responsible for the right sector, the 7th Scottish Rifles for the left. The relief had already started, B company, 7th Scottish Rifles, taking place on the left of the line, when a backward rush of the men who had been occupying the centre of the 234th Brigade position announced that the enemy had broken through, and were even then in the garden to the rear of the mosque. The onrush actually threatened the battalion headquarters which had been established under cover of a little cliff about 250 yards behind the point reached by the enemy. Here an emergency defence was organized by the adjutant of the 7th Scottish Rifles, who put all his headquarters men in, and gathered together stray details of the 234th Brigade. But the situation was saved further forward. The narrative it will be best to give in the words of one involved in the operations:

"The situation in the front line was as follows: A detachment of A company reduced by casualties to about 30 men

and a Lewis gun, under Lieut. G. Watson, were guided to the south-eastern corner of the mosque. Here the party separated. The Lewis gun and 4 men under Lance-Corporal Lipsett held a street head opposite the centre of the mosque. The remainder were held in readiness in a small courtyard at the south-east corner. When the enemy counter attack took place, Lieut. Watson found himself isolated owing to the withdrawal of the other troops on his flanks. He hastily manned the walls and roofs surrounding the courtyard and held it throughout, while Lance-Corporal Lipsett held his street head against a considerable body of Turks. So entirely were these two small parties isolated that Lieut. Watson was wounded by a bomb thrown from the right rear of the courtyard. The enemy swept round both sides of the mosque into the garden on its immediate rear, and there they halted.

"Meanwhile 'C' company was hurriedly called forward without any opportunity being given to inform any but the company commander what was in progress. They were about 70 rifles strong, the Lewis guns being detained with their numbers 1 and 2 at headquarters as useless in a situation which demanded the bayonet. The company then counter-attacked on platoon frontage, in four platoon waves, keeping to the left of the mosque, and encountering, when abreast of it, about 200 Turks. These they went for and drove back to the entrance of the village. Casualties had reduced the company at this time to 2 officers and 40 rifles. Caution, therefore, prevented the charge from being continued, and a rifle duel ensued at 15 yards' range in the open. Owing to the darkness the enemy no doubt thought our force was stronger than it really was, and they withdrew ultimately under cover to the village. Taking the estimate of officers on the spot, it would appear that from 400 to 500 Turks took part in this attack, our strength at the time being about 70 rifles, supported by a machine gun on the right flank. Captain Anderson, the commander of 'C' company, died of wounds received subsequently, and the company casualties during the counter-attack were 1 officer and 30 men. Lieut. Watson, who was wounded, remained on duty until the position was consolidated."

As an appendix to this superb piece of offensive-defensive fighting, it must be stated that next morning when a large party of Turks came towards Lance-Corporal Lipsett's Lewis gun post to demand surrender, he allowed them to come within 30 yards and annihilated the party.

The 23rd of November was spent in concentrating for a great effort, and on November 24th the Division moved out to face the most testing trial of its quality it was ever to experience. North of Nebi Samwil lay El Jib and Bir Nebala, two fortified positions rising steeply from the Wadi which separated them from Nebi Samwil. The former of these was allotted to the 156th Brigade, the latter to the 156th. Brigadier-General Pollock McCall was, if successful at El Jib, to advance and occupy Jedireh and Kulundia. While this operation was in progress Hamilton Moore with the 157th was to capture Er Ram and establish himself astride the Jerusalem-Nablous road. If the Yeomanry Division was equally successful at Beitunia and Bireh, Jerusalem would be securely in British hands.

A general criticism of the plan has already been made. But there were local and very definite reasons why success was impossible so long as the enemy put up any determined resistance. The positions held by the Turks in great strength were extremely difficult of approach, being elevated villages dominating the low ground at their base. Their defences included many machine guns, and from Lifta, Er Ram and Ram Allah the Turkish artillery could sweep front, left, right, and even the rear of the attack. The Division was advancing into a salient which narrowed into an acute triangle 1,500 yards broad at the base and almost 4 miles long, and the further they drove the apex of the angle the more devastating must the enemy's fire become. The attacking force, too, was no longer the 11,000 men who had begun the campaign. Sick-ness as well as wounds had thinned their ranks, and as the narrative of the 7th Scottish Rifles shows, there were now companies of a bare platoon strength, and battalions not much stronger than normal companies.

But the determining factor in the attempt was the impossibility of securing adequate artillery support. In spite of

the most gallant efforts, the gunners had found the absence of roads fatal to any concentration of guns forward. One of the batteries which had pushed on farthest and most quickly (C-264) could only struggle forward with one gun at a time, and even with ten-horse teams took 3 hours to cover the last 2 miles. The attack had to be made with the support of half a dozen field guns, two howitzers and one battery (B-9) of mountain guns. Only an overwhelming artillery preparation could have saved the effort from failure, and for practical purposes there were no guns.

To complete the ruin of the plan, the Yeomanry had already found the advance towards Bireh beyond their strength, and their retirement meant the complete disappearance of all support on the left flank. As the retirement continued it constituted a grave danger to the communications with Ludd and Ramleh.

Nevertheless, on November 24th the three brigades of the 52nd Division marched out to make a gallant attempt at the impossible. The attack against El Jib on the left, met with the smallest possible success, for there, more than at any other point, the failure of the Yeomanry had disastrous results—the Turkish right having now an absolutely free hand. As the brigade passed over the open ground, or occupied bare ridges on their way, they were exposed to a merciless storm of artillery and machine gun fire mainly from their left. The 5th Royal Scots Fusiliers, under Lieut-Colonel Cook, who fell in the struggle of that day, moved out at noon to carry two objectives on the right of their brigade front. One of these, a small walled orchard, on the way to El Jib, they carried 35 minutes from their start, and without heavy losses. But the enemy guns were enfilading the position, and the 5th Scottish Borderers, whose advance was to cover the left of the Fusiliers, found progress still more difficult. Such artillery support as could be mustered was concentrated on the village and the high ground to the left, but all to no purpose. About 50 men, under the cover of the bombardment, managed to work forward for another hundred yards, and reached a point 600 yards from the village. But in front lay a fire-swept zone, and then, terrace after terrace, the ground climbed to El Jib.

While this essential movement on the left was coming to a standstill, Brigadier-General Leggett was putting in his battalions against the centre, with Bir Nebala as his objective. To the 7th Royal Scots had been entrusted the most difficult task. Advancing from the mosque, they were to clear the gardens and enclosures which stretched to the north-east for about 300 yards. Should they succeed in this, and should the day go well elsewhere, the battalion was to advance another half-mile on to the forward slope of Nebi Samwil. Nowhere was the impossibility of the task allotted to the Division so conspicuous as at this point. All morning the Turks had shelled the brigade position, and the Royal Scot attack was launched under an intense enemy fire from all directions. H. E., shrapnel, minenwerfer, machine guns and rifles swept the front of the advancing battalion, and deployment was very difficult in ground so intersected with walls and enclosures. The company attacking on the right, lost two of its officers, one of whom, 2nd Lieut. Hutcheson, died later of his wounds. One of the platoons had only three men left. At farthest the advance covered only a hundred yards. To the left the Royal Scots went further, but met the same ultimate fate. There, No. 4 company lost its commander, Captain Rogers, in the gallant carrying of a shed and wall, and for hours the company made effort after effort to drive the enemy from the enclosures and clear the front. But without guns the force was helpless. "The task for infantry," says the carefully weighed judgment of the Brigadier, "against such an obstacle was an impossible one with the enemy holding every point. A thorough artillery preparation was required to breach the stone walls and clear the enemy from the flanks, which enfiladed the whole position." With this essential point still uncleared, and El Jib still in Turkish hands, the 7th Scottish Rifles could not even begin the attack proper on Nebala.

The 157th Brigade, whose ultimate destination, Er Ram, could only be reached after the other attacks had succeeded, was coming on the scene. The Brigadier, Hamilton Moore, had very early found it necessary to modify the original plans. Advancing along the Wadi to the north of Kubeibeh and edging towards the south, to screen his men as much as possible

from the guns at Beitunia and Lifta, he determined to attempt the advance on Er Ram along the eastern slope of Nebi Samwil. But again the storm of shells and bullets frustrated every effort. Three times the effort was made, and three times it failed before a terrific crossfire from machine guns and rifles and from frontal and right-rear artillery fire. A change of plan was now necessary. Early in the afternoon, when it still seemed possible that the 156th Brigade might have gained its objective, Hamilton Moore attempted to advance along the western slope of the ridge, leaving the 5th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders to guard the right flank, one of their companies lying over the slope, and passing through a trial never to be forgotten by the men who survived. But the 156th Brigade, as has been seen, could not get forward, and the 157th could do little to help them. At four in the afternoon General Hill, reluctant to leave any expedient untried, ordered the 157th to pass on to assist the 155th on the left, carry El Jib if possible, and then press on to Bir Nebula. It was a gallant sight to see the waves of the reinforcing brigade move with perfect steadiness across ground commanded from the region of El Jib. There was no lack of resolute purpose anywhere, and the two brigadiers were ready to try one great final effort. But the thing was impossible. It was now growing dusk. The Turkish fire remained still undiminished; and the British guns still helpless. There, in front of the battalions, lay the horseshoe of the enemy's defences guarded by steep slopes and with their machine gun fire spitting venomously wherever movement showed itself. Farther off, from Lifta on the south to Ram Allah on the north, the heavier artillery thundered.

Before the new attack could be launched, Brigadier-General Pollock McCall received orders to break off, and with that order the great attempt terminated. As General Hill said in humorous consolation to the 155th Brigade, "You could have taken El Jib if you had been allowed; but I'd have required another brigade to dig you out."

That night the 155th bivouacked at Kubeibeh; the 156th held on to Nebi Samwil with the Scottish Rifles, while the Royal Scots lay at Beit Surik and Biddu. The 157th, who had

suffered rather less than the others, occupied an outpost line from Beit Izza through Neda, south-east to the Roman road. The failure had naturally been costly, the Brigade losses being as follows:

Officers—155th, 2 killed, 11 wounded; 156th, 3 killed, 13 wounded; 157th, 1 wounded.

Men—155th, 12 killed, 143 wounded, 11 missing; 156th, 67 killed, 273 wounded; 157th, 12 wounded, 86 wounded.

So the end came without blame attaching to staff officer, or regimental officer, or man in the Division. The thing could not be done for these brief reasons: the strength of the positions to be captured; the fire of all kinds at the disposal of the enemy; the absence of the British artillery; and the failure of the cavalry movement to the north. Nevertheless the failure to achieve a spectacular success must not blind the critic to the actual achievement of the Division. When the 156th Brigade went in to relieve the 75th Division at Nebi Samwil, that position had to all intents and purposes been lost. The gallant action of the 7th Scottish Rifles on the 22nd saved the situation, and the "glorious failure" of November 24th established the British hold on the hill beyond all doubt. Nebi Samwil remained the key of the whole situation, controlling the fate of all subsequent movements; and the men who occupied Jerusalem in December did so because the 52nd had maintained their hold on Nebi Samwil when the situation was at its worst. Like Moses, General Hill was only permitted to see the promised land afar off; but he and his men had, in reality, already opened the gates of the city for others to enter in peaceful occupation

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